

Ephesians 4:1-16

The Apostle Paul was under house arrest in Rome, the centre of a great empire. He was dictating a circular letter to the churches in the province of Asia and its central church at Ephesus. He was calling upon all Christians to live worthy of the great calling to which they were called. A plea which comes to all of us who name ourselves as Christ's people down through the ages.

What is the great calling of God's people?

When we heard the gospel of our salvation and believed in Christ we received the Holy Spirit and with that Spirit we received every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. One of those blessings was that God reveals his mystery to us. God makes known to us his plan for the cosmos. In the fullness of time God is going to unite all things in the heavens and upon the earth under the Lordship of Christ. Rome may have tried to unite the countries of its time under its sovereignty by safe highways and shipping lanes, a common language and a powerful army but Jesus Christ by his death, resurrection and being exalted as Lord will bring all things in the universe, visible and invisible, under his rule for all eternity (1:1-14).

And our calling as Christians is to demonstrate that God is now working to that end. As the gospel of Christ is preached so people from all sorts of backgrounds, nations, colour, language and cultures are unified into one new humanity with Christ as their head (2:14-16). The church then, by being unified in Christ, demonstrates not only to all mankind but also to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places that God's eternal purpose is bringing everything, not only humanity, but all things, under Christ in unity (3:8-12).

Ephesians 4:1-16

How shall we live worthily of this calling?

Now that the Apostle has given us the big picture, our vision, he now turns to the practical working out of that vision.

1. We are to stand firm in the faith v4-6

There is only one God and Father. Paul was writing to Ephesus where the great Temple of Artemis dominated the city and surrounds. The Temple was one of the Seven Wonders of the World. The commerce of this great city depended on the worship of this god. Paul saw it as but an idol as he did all other gods. There was only one God and he was the creator and sustainer of all things.

There is only one Lord and that is the Lord Jesus. Faith must be in Christ alone. We may hold different views on whether we should be baptised as children or adults or by sprinkling, pouring or immersion but the baptism into Christ is the only true baptism whatever the age or mode.

There is only one Spirit and that is the Holy Spirit. He is the one by whom we enter the body of Christ. We may have many denominations because of history, culture or personality but there is a unity that transcends all these differences and that is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and having him means we also have the one hope. He is the guarantee of our eternal life with Christ.

2. We are to keep the unity of the faith v2-3

Sometimes people can so stand firm in the faith that they become aggressive and pugnacious. We are to stand firm in the faith but we are to do it with love. We are to be humble, gentle, meek, patient, or as the old English word says it, longsuffering, forbear with each other in love. We are to be very eager to maintain the unity we have because we have

Ephesians 4:1-16

one God, one Lord Jesus and one Holy Spirit who sustains us, rules over us and dwells within us.

The Apostle uses various pictures to describe this unity as he expounds the unity between Jew and Gentile in Christ. They are fellow citizens in God's nation, fellow members of God's body and fellow bricks in God's temple. It soon becomes apparent that the unity we share in Christ is not a static but a dynamic unity (2:19-22). So what does that mean?

3. We are to grow up into Christ as head v7-14

Citing Psalm 68:18, Paul portrays Christ as the all conquering general who has captivated people by his love and truth and given them as gifts to his church, which is his body.

Some of these gifts are word gifts. Among them are the foundational gifts of Apostles and Prophets. We still have access to those gifts in the New Testament documents. That is why we read scripture when we gather in church. Other word gifts are derived from those foundational gifts, such as Evangelists and Pastor-teachers. It is their task to take the foundational words and apply them to the congregations in their care. There was a time when life was more settled when the Church of England clergyman would try to fulfil this ministry by spending the morning in study of the Bible with prayer and the afternoons in visiting his flock. Perhaps this is not possible these days but they had the principle right. We need the ordained people to know God and his people so we can all be equipped for our serving his purpose for his church.

All the saints, the holy ones, Christians, are God's gifts to the church. God has made each of us different and just right for the ministry he wants us

Ephesians 4:1-16

to have so the church will grow up and together, as a people, be like Christ. We need however the constant ministry of the Apostles and Prophets through the scriptures and the constant exhortation and encouragement of the Evangelists and Pastor-teachers and the constant help and admonitions of our brothers and sisters in Christ to be the sort of people to make God's people the people to fulfil the calling of showing the world and the principalities and powers what God is doing in his creation.

To summarise we are to speak the truth in love.

How has the church, the new humanity fared over the 2000 years?

Regimes have tried to persecute it out of existence. Philosophers have tried to replace it. Heretics have torn it apart. Sceptics have scorned it. The sophisticated have belittled it. Yet it still exists and still grows. It has been called the Forever family and so it is. It has been called the celestial city and so it will be.